



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE PSYCHOLOGY COURSE IN BUSINESS EDUCATION

Among questions of curriculum facing the undergraduate schools of business is what place should be given to psychology. Most of us realize that this science is destined to play an increasingly important rôle in merchandising and industrial relations, and we grant that students heading in these directions should be required to learn at least its elements. There are, furthermore, a few business educators who believe that the applications of psychology to other branches of business, and to human relations generally, are substantial enough to warrant the requirement that *all* students taking the business degree shall have passed an introductory psychology course.¹

What evidence is there to justify this broader faith? Although the "science of the mind," or of human behavior, seems *prima facie* to offer help in dealings with one's fellows (since he wants to judge them accurately and to influence their actions), as well as in private mental hygiene (since nervous disorders are such insidious and widespread enemies) yet if we visit the elementary psychology classroom (and still more if we listen to the students' accounts of the same), we may easily fail to perceive that the lore of reflexes, sensation, imagery, feeling, or the like is getting the student anywhere in the direction of practical social adjustments. I do not propose in this paper to balance the merits of this discipline against those of other subjects which compete with it for a place in the curriculum, but I propose to discuss, as a preliminary to such balancing, the content and the applications to business of a modern introductory psychology course.

Probably the most impressive argument in favor of including psychology in the business curriculum that might be made to the average business educator in brief space would be based on the triumphs of applied psychology during the war. In spite of the

¹ Such a requirement has been made in at least the following institutions: Northwestern University, University of Chicago, and University of Minnesota.

inherent conservatism of military and naval organizations, our schools were drained of psychologists, for morale and propaganda work as well as for the selective mental tests. The test work itself, it is claimed, saved millions of dollars by detecting at the beginning both those recruits who could be trained quite rapidly and those who could never be trained at all. This same work also added to the army's strength by preventing regiments and companies from becoming weak links, dangerous to the whole line, from being overloaded with men of low intelligence.¹ Lieutenant Commander Dodge's ingenious adaptation of the reaction-time apparatus to the problem of selecting apt material for marine gun-pointers is but one more example added to the already considerable list of psychological tests which have been found helpful for selecting "the right man for the place."²

But such an argument, applied to the business curriculum, proves too much. The triumphs of chemistry, physics, and numerous other sciences in the war might equally well be used to argue for their inclusion in the business curriculum. The argument is infected with a common educational fallacy. It infers that because a science underlies a widespread, vital technology, therefore it behooves the ordinary man to learn something of that science. This is, of course, not true. Electricity is a most potent factor in our lives now, but so long as a handful of specialists who understand its complex science are available, the average man can manage with but a smattering of electrical knowledge. In economics, again, there are profound psychological problems relating to human motives in production which are of the greatest moment to our social and industrial system, but their intricacies must be explored mainly by scholars. And so we must look farther for evidence on whether elementary psychology is peculiarly valuable for all business students.

What is the content of this introductory course which we are considering? There are a good many varieties of "psychology" in existence now, and it is therefore important that we have a fairly specific variety in mind throughout the discussion.

¹ See Yoakum and Yerkes, *The Army Mental Tests*, New York, 1920.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 186-88.

Beginning psychology is throwing off, in progressive universities, two handicaps which formerly made it less serviceable, both practically and culturally, than it should have been. The first of these obstacles was undue dominance by the introspective or "structural" school, which confined its attention too much to the phenomena of consciousness, and which was but mildly concerned with the rôle which the science might be made to play in practical control of human behavior. The other impediment was formerly shared with most of the arts-college introductory courses: they furnished techniques for the advanced courses rather than usable tools for life. In this discussion we must consider a course which has avoided these weaknesses, by providing generously for those students who will take no more psychology, and by assimilating the real contributions of animal and human behaviorists, psychoanalysts, abnormal and social psychologists, to the old, solid stock descended from the associationists.¹ Such a fusion is not especially novel either; William James gave a large measure of it to most of our American texts, and even Titchener, veteran exponent of structural psychology, in his recent *Beginner's Psychology* has given considerable space to these other sources of data.

Three traditional topics, with several subdivisions, pretty well cover the whole subject-matter: (1) the relation of mind and body, (2) the original nature of man, and (3) the principles of learning.

1. Although all theories of mind and body are still unsatisfactory enough, the trend is unmistakably toward the determinist hypothesis that mental facts are more completely explicable in terms of physiological causation than in terms of antecedent mental facts. A subject may say, for example, "In sooth, I know not why I'm so sad"; the "sadness" being to him a diffuse but unitary thing, spontaneous and unaccountable. The psychologist, however, looks upon such an emotional state as a complex of numerous reactions, many of which can be separately identified, and the complex has been aroused by other reflexes which are not directly mirrored by consciousness. This trend toward a determinist hypothesis, in

¹ See R. S. Woodworth's *Dynamic Psychology* (1918) for a discussion of how these psychological "isms" may be reconciled. See also his *Psychology, a Study of Mental Life* (1921).

fact, is the same that has taken place in the natural sciences generally; it leads away from attempts to explain and conjure one obscurity by reference to another obscurity, toward attempts to explain and control by reference to physical entities which are open to all observers.

The vogue of dealers in psychic goods among business men today, and the large rewards harvested by them, are obvious enough. It seems possible that even the modicum of psychology which our Sophomore learns in this elementary course will make him a harder prospect for purveyors of spiritism, phrenology, will power, and even psychoanalysis! Of course, on the other hand, a little learning has its dangers. Exploiters of fake "inventions" testify that their easiest victims are professional men, who know just enough physical and chemical science to be credulous of anything presented in its terms. Hence, no doubt, hoaxes in "practical psychology" will evolve *pari passu* with the spread of psychological science, and discrimination will develop only in the same way it does in hygiene and medicine.

2. As we enter the field of native behavior apparatus we meet first the familiar topic of reflexes and instincts; and here especially do we need some physiology in order to exorcise the numerous sociological and vulgar instinct ghosts. A closely allied subject is emotion and feeling. It seems likely, in fact, that "emotional" is merely the quality common to those complexes of instinctive reactions in which certain visceral elements, such as those causing blushing or paleness, "quakings" in the stomach, etc., are prominent. These compound reactions are called "pleasant" if in the main they tend to prolong themselves or cause the subject to appropriate the exciting stimulus. They are "unpleasant" if the direction of his total response is repulsive. It will doubtless be admitted by most economists that there are large possibilities for improving the art of managing men through study of the basic human motives, even though many of the premature attempts in this direction must be discredited. William James, Robert Wolf, Scott, Veblen, and Parker have all given us pregnant hints, even if their details may turn out to be mostly wrong. Men's dominant motives—say avarice, fame, love—are secondary compounds, built

up by experience from primary impulses such as bodily pleasures, "curiosity," fear, rage, novelty, gregariousness (no one can wisely claim to know just what these are as yet), and it appears probable that any person may learn to appeal more effectively to his fellows by studying this compounding process scientifically, than by relying upon haphazard common sense.

Finally under the heading of native equipment we must notice individual differences, differential psychology. This is the field of mental tests, vocational guidance, subnormal and supernormal intelligence, innate abilities, and tastes. Inborn mental differences are supposedly of two kinds—differences in general intelligence (which is learning capacity, practically) and in specific abilities such as musical or mechanical. The wide applicability of this kind of knowledge need be subjected to no comment, for it is probably the most popularized branch of psychology today. Business managers very often act upon the theory that men's native talents are about equal except in the virtue of perseverance; consequently psychologists such as Scott in the field of practical personnel work in business and the army, have hammered hardest on the proposition that native capacities differ widely, that they are the dominant influences in executive efficiency, and that they can be detected with considerable accuracy by brief psychological tests. Besides its applications in the selection, placing, and training of personnel, differential psychology will probably have a place in wage administration. Recognition of the normal curves of ability distribution, as fast as they can be discerned, will make that contentious question in rate-settings, "Whose performance shall be standard?" easier to answer.

3. The principles of learning ramify further, and have more consequences, than any of us suspects. Everyone knows something of the power of habit, for good or evil, and knows too that there is some art in deliberate learning, such as training the memory. Our student can well afford to have this general knowledge sharpened. The far-reaching controversy over nature and nurture cannot be intelligently approached without a view of the learning process's mechanism. One of the most momentous developments in psychological science has been the gradual convergence of studies on motor

habits—many of these in lower animals—and studies of “association of ideas,” in memory, reasoning, and the like. It seems entirely probable now that the greater part of our mental “acts” of memory, perception, reasoning, and all the old introspective categories, are but reflections of underlying neuromuscular habits, and consequently are to be understood by reference to the simpler habits which can be studied objectively.

Three special topics which involve the foregoing basic divisions may be mentioned to illustrate further the range of a good introductory course.

First, the psychological aspects of fatigue, normal and abnormal, and their relation to the long series that runs from “nervousness” to insanity. Second, the closely related field of “functional” nervous abnormalities, which is the particular object of psychoanalytic study by the Freudians and others. Nervous disease, to be sure, is still shrouded in mystery. The functional schools have plenty of cases in which their contention seems valid that the difficulty is in maladaptive habits, due to environmental situations giving rise to “conflicts” of motives. The application of this doctrine to industrial unrest made by Carleton Parker may turn out to be true enough to be significant. Probably a great deal of the trouble in “overwork,” as Scott pointed out, is due to our failure to establish proper habits of relaxation. The effect of emotional state on working efficiency is a subject of popular knowledge that promises large returns from scientific study; and after all these remains the tonic action of real fatigue. Enough of all this is known so that there is already a real opportunity to teach some mental hygiene in the beginning psychology course, and naturally the quality will improve with advances in psychiatry.

Nor is the usefulness of these branches of “abnormal” psychology confined to avoidance and treatment of positive disorders. One of the principal benefits arising from the Freudian movement is in its elaboration and refinement of the old doctrine that in all of us, “the wish is father to the thought.” I do not indorse all or most of the Freudian tenets in this direction, nor especially the sociological deductions that have been hastily drawn from them;

but I believe this kind of study will be highly useful in making us quicker to detect the "complexes" of special interest which bias our judgments—probably more useful for recognizing our own complexes than those of others.

The third special subject I had in mind is the social interplay of responses, especially as to imitation, "suggestion," emulation, custom, fashion.

It is suggested that a course in social psychology might better be required for all business students than the general psychology. There is a line of social psychology, of sociological descent, which may often be taken without any psychological prerequisite, and it is not without value. But its fundamental postulates are those of the psychological science of twenty years or more ago. No qualified psychologist would teach social psychology before the elementary course, but, on the other hand, a usable approach to social processes can be given in connection with the fundamental work.

Let us now take a more systematic view of the possible applications of psychology in business, and bring to a head the inquiry of what it is worth to the general run of business students. I should outline the main directions¹ of this "human engineering" as follows:

I. In merchandising

- A. Forecasting demands
- B. Advertising
- C. Buying and Selling

II. In managing men (one's self as well as subordinates)

- A. Selection
- B. Training
- C. Incentives, financial and other; promoting "interest" in work
- D. Mental hygiene
 - 1. As to fatigue and proper recreation
 - 2. As to "conflicts"

Now we may raise the fundamental question whether these varieties of engineering have much to do with students in fields other than merchandising and personnel—say with the financial group. A broad view is necessary. All our students will be advertisers and sellers to some extent; all must forecast the future

¹ No division is made here for the service of protection against psychological frauds, since these are being vended in connection with each point on the list.

drifts of demand and public opinion if their business success is to be more than a matter of chance. What is perhaps even more to the point, all of them need defenses against selling offensives, particularly in the insidious form of propaganda. The large use made of psychologists by the governments in the war for "morale" work indicates that the science is directly applicable in such directions. Moreover, "There is, or there ought to be," as John Mill said, "a science of character," which must in the long run be founded on sound psychology. No doubt can be felt of the utility which an art of character judgment would have, in all manner of human relations, if it existed. Although psychology cannot make claims nearly so sweeping as the "character analysts," still there appears to be a great deal of usefulness in the psychoanalytic branch in this direction already, when it is checked by the other studies which are closer in touch with physiological science.

All our students, we hope, will become leaders of some grade, which is to say that they must learn to select, direct, and energize subordinates. It is true that employment psychology is most obviously promising in large-scale management, but this is true chiefly as to mental tests. Accurate concepts of intelligence, aptitude, incentives, psychology of learning and skill, fatigue and nervousness, are serviceable down to the manager of one person—himself. This application of human engineering to one's self brings out the fact that it is no more essentially predacious than is the use of any other item of knowledge, but like any other art, it gives its possessor power for good or evil.

Finally let us face the explicit objection likely to be raised: As Josh Billings said: Which is worse, not to know so much, or to know so much that "ain't so"? This subject-matter is so complex, and exact methods of study are so new, that conclusions on most of the psychological topics we have mentioned are but fragmentary and tentative. Much of what is now taught for probable fact will later be discarded—what field of knowledge is not in the same situation?

But to me the most important point is this: Necessary data are fast accumulating—in differential psychology, conspicuously, as by analysis of the army tests. In the science as a whole there

will be great strides in the next few decades. Students who learn the psychological alphabet today will be able to find and use the more accurate materials which will be brought forth by specialists tomorrow.

It may be noticed that many of the reasons set forth above, in favor of requiring all business students to take psychology, apply with equal force to other professional groups, as in law and medicine; and as the engineering courses are approaching closer to the economics departments, what has been said on the business course will bear in some measure on engineering courses also. It is a fact that some medical and law schools are seriously considering a psychology requirement. The temptation is always strong to instal special courses in the professional faculty, as in the cases of educational and social psychology. The danger is, as I have pointed out with regard to social psychology, that the special course will be weak on fundamentals. It seems preferable, therefore, that all groups should participate in the general introductory course of the arts college, the different special professional needs being cared for by separate recitation sections.

A critical question is the time required. How long a term will the course under consideration occupy? It can be given in a fairly substantial form in three hours a week for two quarters, perhaps in five hours one semester. That will hardly include any laboratory work, which, of course, is important. If all students of any professional school are required to take psychology it is doubtless best to make laboratory for additional credit optional, so as to cut the required hours to the bone. If the required fundamental course is too short, however, students taking it will not be able to enter advanced psychology courses if they wish to, later, without going out of their way.

I have, so far, confined myself to the vocational or practical aspect of psychology for business students. The business course is a vocational school. But few vocationalists will be indifferent to "cultural" aspects. As I gather it, the cultural aims of education are chiefly of two sorts: aesthetic, in the broad sense of developing inner resources for a larger and in the long run more satisfying

life; and civic-moral, in the wide sense of enabling the student to live the more harmoniously with his fellows.

On the aesthetic side we may mention two prominent services rendered by the study of psychology—satisfaction of curiosity, as is the case with all sciences, and enrichment of the interest which runs through art, literature, and daily intercourse in the puzzles of human nature.

On the civic-moral side an economist needs not to be reminded that the gravest political issues—the questions of socialism, for example—hang on questions of the extent of inborn differences, of the limits of human educability, of the springs of human action, and judgments as to the hidden motives of particular actors.

From the cultural as well as from the practical point of view, therefore, psychology has a utility to any business student which can be equaled by few other disciplines.

Z. CLARK DICKINSON

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA